

Small Group Material

Rule of Life: Abiding John 15.4-10

Welcome question (10 mins) Think of a moment when you felt close to God. What was important about it for you? What did you learn about God?

Word Read John 15.4-10 (10 mins) (If you can, read from the NRSV as it uses the word 'abide')

- What does it mean to you to abide in Christ?
- What does Jesus say are the connections between abiding, obeying, joy and fruitfulness?

Read Mark 14.32-36 (No more than 5 mins)
What strikes you about this passage?

Read this out: (5 mins)

Jesus was a very busy man, yet in this passage, as in many others we see that he took time out to spend in communion with God. He said that he could do nothing apart from God and that his entire mission in life was to do the will of God. His relationship with his Father was central to his whole life.

We see this in Jesus' daily life. He frequently leaves the crowds to be alone with God, retreating to a quiet place to pray. In this way he became a role model for the disciples; when they looked at Jesus, they longed to be like him, to have the same kind of intimate 'abiding' with God that he had. That is why they said to him, Lord teach us to pray. They knew he knew how to pray.

What sets Jesus apart is that sense of intimacy. He addresses God as Abba, Father. The word Abba is similar to our word 'Daddy'. It speaks

of closeness, love, and a trusting relationship, like little children have with their parents. Jesus was not afraid to go to God, to share his fears and his anguish. In the Garden of Gethsemane, at his moment of greatest need, Jesus turns to his Father. His prayer is one of faith, 'with you all things are possible'. It is honest, 'remove this cup from me'. In the end his prayer is nothing other than a desire to do God's will, 'yet not what I want but what you want'.

Jesus was a person of prayer. He prayed regularly, and he prayed often. The busier he got, the more he turned to God in prayer. Why? Because he knew God! He understood God as a loving father who wanted to love, teach, and heal his people. God, for Jesus, was not only a God of compassion but also a God of strength. He turned to God in order to find the strength he needed to carry out his mission.

The most vivid picture of God comes in the story of the Prodigal son. The wayward son who has squandered his father's money returns in repentance and remorse, expecting judgement and punishment. Instead he receives a warm, loving, welcoming embrace. That is what God is like.

If we knew God in this way, prayer and communion would not be a chore but rather our inner desire throughout our day. God longs for us, searches for us, and even dies for us – that we might return that longing, searching and self sacrifice. Once we catch a glimpse of what God is like we will want to spend time with Him.

Prodigal Son (10 mins)

In the story of the Prodigal Son we see a picture of what God is like in the character of the Father. How does this illustration of God match your own understanding of what God is like? Are there ways in which you have a somewhat skewed picture of God? Do you know where this has come from?

Getting Practical (20 mins)

Screen-share the 4 pictures on the bottom page as a help to focus.

Write a letter to God. Tell God your hopes and longings, tell him what you're worried about and what you need from him. You may even want to pray that God will change your shewed or distorted view of Him. You may want to confess your sins and seek his forgiveness. You won't be asked to share this. It's completely private between you and God.

Give people about 10 minutes to do this. Mention that they could both mute and turn off the video.

When you come together: 'Some people find writing helps them. Others not so much.'
Ask people, 'Can you share things you find help you in prayer?'

Praying Time (15 mins)

Captivate Us by Christy Nockels
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vcezx5RI7sA>

Let's pray for our own walk with Jesus, our 'abiding'.
Pray for any who feel particularly far from God.
Pray for those doing Alpha, those particularly struggling to come to know the love of Father God. Are there any people who you particularly want to pray for?



